

MA THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

Public Information Department, 11150 East Blvd., Cleveland, Ohio 44106; 216/421-7340

PRESS RELEASE

August 1, 1985

RESISTANT RHYTHMS: THE ART OF JAPANESE STENCILS
August 20 - October 20, 1985

The intricately cut paper stencils that are used in the creation of traditional Japanese resist-dyed patterned fabrics are featured in an exhibition on view at The Cleveland Museum of Art from August 20 through October 20, 1985. Resistant Rhythms: The Art of Japanese Stencils includes forty-nine stencils dating from the 19th century, superb examples of a painstaking craft which flourished in 18th- and 19th-century Japan and which, despite modern mechanization of the textile industry, continues to thrive in the hands of dedicated craftsmen. Exhibited with the stencils, which come from the Museum's collections, are examples of late 19th-century and contemporary stenciled fabrics and papers lent by private collectors. The history of stenciling in Japan and the process of cutting stencils and transferring stencil designs to cloth are described in the text accompanying the exhibition and in a brochure prepared by exhibition organizer Marjorie Williams, associate curator in the Museum's Department of Education.

A stencil is composed of several sheets of handmade mulberry bark paper that have been brushed with persimmon juice and aged from three to fifteen years, a treatment that strengthens and waterproofs the paper and turns it a deep copper brown. The stencil artisan traces the guidelines of his design on the paper, then uses razor-sharp tools to make his cuts and perforations, a process which demands the utmost concentration and control and which may take hours or weeks, depending upon the complexity of the design. To reinforce the lace-like stencil,

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2-resistant rhythms

he inserts a delicate web of silk threads between the separated sheets of cut paper, realigns the patterns, and pastes them back together. Again the stencil is aged, for three or more years.

The first step in the cloth-dyeing process is the application of rice paste through the stencil onto white fabric. When the fabric is submerged in indigo dye, the areas of cloth painted with paste resist the dye and retain their white color. Stencil designs are easily imagined as blue-and-white fabrics; the dark areas represent the indigo patterns, while the white are the negative patterns, or the "resistant rhythms" of the stencils.

The stencils in the exhibition illustrate motifs that have embellished Japanese textiles and other decorative and useful objects for the past thousand years. The majority of these motifs are derived from nature--realistic or stylized depictions of birds, fish, pines, or flowers--often combined with geometric patterns. Many have a symbolic or historic significance. The peony, for example, connotes prosperity; the crane, long life or immortality. Some have literary associations. The design of irises and plank foot-bridges, a popular motif probably known best as a subject of decorative painting, recalls a scene from the tenth-century literary classic, Tales of Ise.

Miss Williams will present lectures on the art of Japanese stenciling on two Wednesdays, August 21 and August 28, at 2:15 p.m. She will also give talks in the exhibition on Wednesday, August 28, and Sunday, September 1, at 1:30 p.m.

The brochure for the exhibition can be purchased for \$1.00 at the Museum Bookstore.

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For additional information or photographs, please contact the Public Information Office, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106; 216/421-7340.